Regional Refugee Response for the Ukraine Situation

Podkarpackie Coordination Group (PCG)

Date: 29 November 2023
Time: 11:00am – 1:00pm
Venue: Governor's Office in Rzeszów

General Discussion Highlights:

Welcome and Introduction.	Action Points
Yolanda Ines Zapata Henry, Head of UNHCR Rzeszow Field Office: We aim to shift the dynamics of the coordination mechanism by enhancing our focus on needs analysis and more operational coordination. Our partner, PSAR, will present an analysis of the needs identified in its work. Additionally, DRC will provide insights into their activities this year, particularly the transition from Pro-hub and Blue Dot to other services, and collaborative efforts in these specific areas. We will share the outcomes of the Joint Protection Report, a collaborative effort by UNHCR and various organizations. An important discussion point will be the contingency plan, addressing the importance of readiness in case of emergencies. Our goal is to make this coordination mechanism more operational; it was established to foster consensus and facilitate collaborative action for enhanced operational coordination.	
PSAR's analysis on context and needs.	**Action Points**
Monika Marković, PSAR: Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude for UNHCR's support in our activities conducted in schools related to child prevention. I would also like to extend thanks to other organizations that refer their beneficiaries to us, enabling us to assist as many people as possible. As for the evolving needs, they vary. Refugees may require something new, or they may need what we have already initiated, such as therapies. That's why, in our strategic goals for 2024, we plan to continue our activity in the TUTU Cultural Centre. In 2023, we provided psychological support to 4500 children so far. Some of them are in the therapeutic process, and we also work with their guardians and parents, making it necessary to continue this effort in the coming year. Due to limited funds, we are moving to a more cost-effective location at ul. Dąbrowskiego 17, which is currently undergoing renovation. Starting from January, refugees with protection needs can be referred there.	UNHCR: Invitation for Local Education Authority to address the issue of education and socio-economic inclusion of refugees during the next meetings

Another planned activity for 2024 is advocacy with public authorities. We have taken various actions, including training, to increase our influence on stakeholders in Rzeszów and Podkarpackie who decide which services should be provided to those needing support. We face another challenge – the opening of the International Youth Centre in Rzeszów. It will be the only center dedicated to youth, where they can freely realize their initiatives. They will have the autonomy to decide which needs to prioritize. It will be an open space without moderated activities, but with psychologists present if the youth need them. In Lublin, there are already three such centers. Currently, we are in the stage of seeking financing. **Yolanda Ines Zapata Henry, Head of UNHCR Rzeszow Field Office:** We have heard that there are concerns in Rzeszów regarding the inclusion of kids and young people. Additionally, there was an incident involving Ukrainian young people in Rzeszów. What is your analysis of the inclusion of young people in Rzeszów, and what do you think we can do within the coordination mechanism to address these issues? **Monika Marković, PSAR:** About two weeks ago in Rzeszów, a 16-year-old Ukrainian attacked a 13-year-old with a knife. This incident is just one example and may be isolated. We live in a neighborhood with a playground, and we observe what is happening there. It's evident that young people don't have a space to go to. Besides addressing the needs of refugees and integration, young people, in general, lack guidance. To mitigate various unpleasant events, we primarily focus on working in schools, particularly in Ukrainian classes. **Jan Marković, PSAR:** This event is a significant trigger for potential anti-Ukrainian sentiments among the population. Therefore, I believe it needs to be addressed not only here but also requires a broader response to such situations. When it comes to the issue of youth not having things to do, it also encompasses their plans for the future, continuation of education, and job applications. We lack specific data regarding this issue, which is why we aim to address it. The challenge for us will be reaching out to the youth that needs our help the most and is hardest to reach. We need to find points of entry into this youth community and analyze their relationships with Polish youth. Additionally, there is a challenge concerning the perception that kids and teenagers can take care of themselves. **Yolanda Ines Zapata Henry, Head of UNHCR Rzeszow Field Office:** For the organizations providing counselling and psychosocial support to refugees – have you identified any of these incidents related to anti-Ukrainian sentiment increasing? **Jan Marković, PSAR:**	

I would say this problem is growing. As we observe negative comments on social media about Ukrainians, we notice that the reactions are becoming more substantial. **Maciej Maruszak, Polish Red Cross** I think this problem is more complex. Regarding the incident, I believe it is being overpublished. As far as I know, this specific boy and his family had already faced legal problems in Ukraine, so it is not directly connected to the Polish-Ukrainian conflict. The issue now lies in the way people perceive the situation. It's not just about Poles being reluctant towards Ukrainians; there is also a reluctance among Ukrainians towards Poles, fueled by politicians' statements and media representations on the Ukrainian side. This has an impact on the Polish attitude towards Ukrainians. Concerning the youth, there is an integration problem, but not just in terms of Polish-Ukrainian integration. I also see challenges in integrating with solely Polish groups within these age brackets. I have the impression that isolation, due to COVID-19 and the two-year lockdown, has discouraged kids and teenagers from leaving their houses. They are immersed in social media and online reality, facing difficulties in meeting each other. This presents a challenge for us to create a space for them and encourage real-life activities among them. It's not just a problem in Rzeszów but nationwide. **Jan Marković, PSAR:** There has been no noticeable increase in criminal activity within the Ukrainian community that we have observed. Incidents like the one mentioned earlier can alter perceptions, and these perceptions, in turn, have the potential to influence reality. **Maciej Maruszak, Polish Red Cross** It's essential to emphasize that the behavior of this Ukrainian boy is not representative of the common attitude; rather, it was an isolated incident rooted in earlier issues. Consequently, we should avoid inflating this topic. **Yolanda Ines Zapata Henry, Head of UNHCR Rzeszow Field Office:** On our part, we propose a more focused meeting on the topic of socio-inclusion to discuss strategies for addressing this matter. As UNHCR, we collaborate with the host community, local governments, and Polish society. In our discussions with local authorities and organizations, we aim to promote an inclusive narrative. While our surveys indicate some rising tensions, it has not yet become a priority or a significant issue. **Natalia Vorozhko, Alight**	

This problem is indeed occurring; we recently received a report of a bullying case at our office. If a child faces challenges in socializing within their native environment, it becomes even more difficult in a new setting. **Lisa Ranzenigo, Soleterre** We have encountered numerous situations like this. In addition to providing the necessary mental health and psychosocial support, parallel efforts at schools involve educating teachers and targeting different age groups – children, adolescents, and adults – to promote integration and inclusion. **Maciej Maruszak, Polish Red Cross** Violence, exclusion, and discrimination are likely to increase if these sentiments persist, from one side or the other. Educational efforts are crucial to raise awareness that Ukrainians are not only fighting for their freedom but also for ours. This understanding should foster more compassion and support for Ukrainians. Additionally, it's important to make Ukrainians aware that the expectations we have are rooted in basic human nature – expressions of gratitude or simply saying 'thank you.' These expectations revolve around human interactions. When our governments engage in blame or exchange unpleasant remarks, it affects ordinary people. We must not let ourselves be influenced by this. As organizations, it is our role to speak out about these issues loudly and support both sides. **Yolanda Ines Zapata Henry, Head of UNHCR Rzeszow Field Office** We need to allocate dedicated time within our coordination mechanism to actively promote social inclusion, embracing all nationalities. As representatives of the humanitarian sector, we bear the responsibility towards society to foster a peaceful environment that values inclusion and diversity. It's evident that we all share the same commitment to adopting an inclusive approach for both Poles and Ukrainians. Alongside addressing the social cohesion needs, we must concurrently advocate for and support the government's response, considering the specific rights refugees hold according to international law.	
DRC updates on conducted activities	**Action Points**
Kamila Ashei, DRC As previously communicated, we are concluding our operations in Rzeszów and, by April, across Poland. We take pride in the work accomplished, including our collaboration with UNHCR, and we hope that these efforts can continue. In Rzeszów, our Protection Hub, initiated in June 2022 and taken over by DRC in April 2023, serves as a secure space offering comprehensive support and care. Our dedicated team in Rzeszów comprises a Team	

Leader, Protection Assistants, Child-friendly space facilitators, Protection Officers, MHPSS Officers, MEAL Officers, and Support service staff. Activities are structured into two outputs, one focusing on adults and the other on children. For Output 1, we concentrate on providing information, identifying individuals at heightened risk, offering individual MHPSS, language classes, workshops, consultations for Polish labor market preparation, structured group MHPSS support, and community group initiatives. Output 2 revolves around identifying children at heightened risk, providing individual MHPSS for boys and girls, child-friendly structured MHPSS activities, and outreach and engagement initiatives. We extend our support to two shelters: Magdalena's Shelter (Pomagam Bo Lubię Foundation) and Izabela's Shelter (Ropczyce), visiting each once a week. Our support encompasses individual and group MHPSS activities, as well as general protection assistance as needed. At Izabela's Shelter, we also conduct Polish Language Courses. Our Protection Hub collaborates with other partners, including PSAR, Halina Nieć, Level Up Foundation, and UNHCR. In Przemyśl, our operations differ slightly. We are present at the Blue Dot and conduct activities through Mobile Outreach. Blue Dots are located at the train station and in Medyka. Our team focuses on providing information to travelers, referring them to other service providers based on their needs, and supporting shelters such as Marco, Bilana, Kidalowice, and Radymno. Activities in Przemyśl are categorized into two outputs for adults and children. For adults, we provide information for travelers, individual MHPSS, identification of persons at heightened risk, and group MHPSS sessions. Concerning children, our activities include identifying those at heightened risk, focused MHPSS for boys and girls, and outreach and engagement initiatives for social inclusion. **Jose Luis Hernandez, UNHCR Protection Officer** The Protection Hub will be closing at the end of this month. However, we are adopting a new approach by going local and aiming to reach as many refugees as possible. Instead of concentrating in one location, we plan to take information to places where refugees are situated. Our strategy involves close collaboration with partners and public authorities to provide refugees with information and support in exercising their rights. **Yolanda Ines Zapata Henry, Head of UNHCR Rzeszow Field Office** I would like to express my gratitude to the colleagues from DRC for their valuable work. The Protection Hub played a crucial role last year in providing essential services. When emergencies arise, activities and projects like these ensure that refugees can access vital information. Many organizations, including ours,	

encounter similar challenges, such as budget constraints and transitioning from emergency phases to local integration. It's regrettable that our colleagues are leaving the Protection Hub, but our focus for the next year is to explore more sustainable ways to continue providing information and services. While the closure of the Protection Hub poses challenges, we are committed to working with local organizations and authorities to ensure sustainability in supporting refugees. We anticipate potential gaps and will collaborate with partners to address them, maximizing the resources available.

Christopher Nyamandi, Alight
I am expressing concern about the imminent closure of these activities within a short timeframe. Given the unpredictable nature of the conflict in Ukraine and its evolving dynamics, there is a risk that we will be left with people facing serious needs. While we aim to strengthen our capacity within our system, we are also encountering challenges as some organizations approach us, stating that they lack funding. Do we have contingency plans in place in case organizations abruptly close their operations?

Yolanda Ines Zapata Henry, Head of UNHCR Rzeszow Field Office
Typically, we commend the state response. As a UN agency, we play a coordination role, but it doesn't imply that we will provide the entire response for refugees. Our approach involves understanding the government's capacity and response first, and then complementing it. In the case of contingency planning and mass influx, we initiate discussions with the government to determine its response before coordinating with other organizations and their projects and activities. Contingency activities are activated when the government reports a lack of capacity, and collaborative action becomes necessary.

While we currently perceive the situation as stable, we must remain prepared. In the event of an emergency, if required, we can reactivate services. For services provided by DRC addressing specific refugee needs, we are working with our partners to ensure continued coverage.

The issue at hand extends beyond resources to include strategy. UNHCR will discontinue cash assistance at the end of December due to budget constraints. In Poland, the government provides social services, and we cannot sustain the cash program. We depend on governmental actors to deliver social service assistance to refugees.

Let's collaborate with local institutions and leverage existing capacity to continue addressing the needs of refugees. If there are immediate priorities or pressing needs, we can discuss how to proceed.

Lisa Ranzenigo, Soleterre
We have observed a lack of specialized psychological interventions, particularly for vulnerable groups left behind in emergency situations. While we have been addressing needs, there remains a significant concern about who will take care of hospitalized Ukrainians if operations are closed. The focus has largely

been on the last layer of the MHPSS pyramid, and there is a need to fill the gap to address the other layers. Tomorrow, the new MHPSS strategic plan for 2023-2027 will be implemented. It includes 33 mental health centers and an analysis to direct support appropriately. We utilize diagnostic tools to understand trauma levels and provide tailor-made support based on the results of diagnostic analysis, incorporating scientific tools during counseling sessions. **Izabela Quinn, CORE** There is a shortage of Ukrainian-speaking psychologists in government care, and there has been a lack of coordination on this issue. The waiting time for a psychologist, even though the situation is more stable, may increase trauma among refugees. **Maciej Maruszak, Polish Red Cross** The issue of psychological support is not limited to Podkarpackie but is a nationwide concern. There is a shortage of psychologists and psychiatrists in Poland, and existing facilities are overcrowded. The presence of a language barrier may further hinder the provision of appropriate support.	
POP fund opportunity	**Action Points**
Piotr Soborski, UNHCR Assistant Inter-Agency Coordination Officer It is a new independent fund to support assistance for people from Ukraine in Poland. The fund's operator is the Polish Center for International Aid. It is aimed primarily at small and medium-sized Polish non-governmental organizations operating outside large metropolitan areas. The fund is a joint initiative of the third sector, established after consultations with UN agencies, donors such as Google, Meta, banks, and other international companies operating in Poland. This year's call for proposals will include about PLN 5 million. Project proposals need to be compliant with one of the POP Fund thematic priorities: improved living conditions of refugees residing outside of the main metropolises and in the rural areas, including support for voluntary relocation of refugees from metropolises, where the cost of living is high, to smaller towns, with lower cost of living; support for voluntary relocation of refugees from the mass accommodation centers; support to refugees facing barriers in accessing the labour market, including refugee women with children until the age of 7; support to older (retired) refugees, and/or persons with disability; support to inclusion and continuation of education of refugee children in the Polish schools; support for refugees from other groups at risk of social exclusion, including ethnic minorities and sexual minorities.	

Regarding the budget of a project, it must be prepared in Polish currency. The costs in the budget should be: realistic, transparently calculated, described in detail and related to the direct implementation of the project. Own contribution is not required. Regulations and other necessary documents can be found at: https://popfund.pl/.	
Joint Protection Analysis report findings	**Action Points**
Jose Luis Hernandez, UNHCR Protection Officer Joint Protection Analysis report was issued in October 2023 by National Protection Sector. It is based on surveys focus group discussions, individual interviews with children and other monitoring initiatives carried out by UNHCR and other partners. The report juxtaposes the needs of refugees that arrived during the influx, between February 24 2022 and June 2022, and the needs of new arrivals, from the beginning of 2023 until June 2023. If you see the protection needs of these two different profiles, they start to differ. For example, an average household size of people arriving last year is 2,5, contrary to people arriving this year – 2,2. It shows us that there are more single households arriving this year, contrary to the previous year when there was a larger proportion of female-headed households with children. Last year, in 2022, 24% of refugees that arrived consisted of one-person households, this year it is 42%. The priority needs have changed as well. If we ask refugees, what is their most urgent need, new arrivals say accommodation. Those that arrived last year state that their most urgent need is material assistance. It tells us that refugees who arrived last year have managed to find the accommodation and started to settle in Poland. The most needed information, for both early and new arrivals, is financial aid. It is a little bit different regarding job opportunities – 27% of early arrivals say that they need information regarding job opportunities, while 32% new arrivals say that need information on job opportunities. It means that refugees are starting to access the labor market in Poland. Information about accommodation is sought by 14% of people that arrived last year, and 23% by people that arrived this year. Regarding other protection needs from different categories, one of the main concerns of refugees is PESEL UKR deactivation. There were reports from refugees that their PESEL UKR has been deactivated and they do not know what has happened. The Protection Sector has documented 91 incidents of deactivation; in half of these incidents the individuals claimed to be have been outside of Poland for less than 30 days. Refugees find out about the deactivation of their PESEL UKR usually when they stop receiving social benefits or could not access healthcare or education.	

Refugees also reported an increase of GBV risks when it came to accessing the accommodation. The topic of mental and psychosocial well-being focuses on children, their loneliness and their concerns about their families in Ukraine. Also, there were cases of where parents prevented their children from accessing psychological help. There is a large number of children that are not accessing the national education system. Approximately 78% of secondary school age students remained outside of the Polish education system. Last year 10 000 refugee students dropped out from school. We have seen that people that were employed in Ukraine have a difficult time to find an employment here in Poland. Persons between 40-59 have an employment rate in Ukraine of 82%; when they come to Poland it falls to 43%. Part of the problem is recognition of qualifications and the language barrier. There is also a risk of exploitation – 60% said they work very long hours, 10% said they are underpaid, 8% said they cannot communicate freely with their coworkers or anyone else in their workplace, 8% said they worked without a contract or a contract covering all the hours. Additionally, Roma Ukrainians refugees struggle to access accommodation. **Christopher Nyamandi, Alight** I have a question regarding PESEL deactivation. Do we know what this problem is about? **Jose Luis Hernandez, UNHCR Protection Officer** In some situations, refugees may be marked as tourists at the border when they re-enter Poland. Some refugees may be outside Poland for 30 days or more, or they may go to apply for temporary protection in other EU countries. If they live here in Poland and have never left the country, there may have been deactivation incidents. There are various reasons for these incidents. It is usually easy to reactivate the PESEL UKR, but the problem they may face may be regaining access to their social services.	
Contingency updates	**Action Points**
Piotr Soborski, UNHCR Assistant Inter-Agency Coordination Officer I would like to provide you with an overview of activities already included to our National Contingency Matrix. Currently we have 83 activities, 56 dedicated for Podkarpackie and 27 spread country-wide. They are offered by 24 organizations across 11 sectors: • Short-term accomodation: Polish Red Cross, ADRA Poland	

- Case management: UNHCR, IOM, Folkowisko Fundation, Central Roma Council in Poland, Caritas in Rzeszow,
- Financial Support: IOM, Save the Children, International Resque Committee, CARE, HIAS Poland, Oxfam
- Educational support: UNICEF, IOM, Caritas in Rzeszow, ADRA Polska,
- Emergency shelter support: (tents, generator, fuel) – UNHCR, UNICEF, Folkowisko Fundation
- Food provision: IOM, Polish Red Cross, Caritas in Rzeszow
- GBV prevention: UNHCR, ADRA Polska, CARE, Soleterre, PSAR
- Hygiene kit distribution: UNICEF, IOM, ADRA Polska, CORE, Polish Red Cross
- Information provision on services and refugees' rights: UNHCR, IOM, CultureLab, International Rescue Committee, DRC, Stowarzyszenie Mudita, IOCC/ELEOS, ELIL
- Monitoring and referrals: UNHCR, IOM, HIAS, Soleterre, Caritas in Rzeszów, PSAR
- NFIs distribution: UNHCR, IOM, CORE
- Primary health care: UNICEF
- MHPSS (not including children): IOM, PRO FIL/UNHCR, DRC, HIAS, Soleterre, Caritas in Rzeszow, IOM, Folkowisko Fundation
- Child friendly psychosocial support (child specific): IOM, PSAR, DRC, Fundacja Dajemy Dzieciom Siłę (FDDS), Ocalenie, Soleterre, Caritas in Rzeszow, Folkowisko Fundation, Central Roma Council in Poland
- Socio-Economic inclusion: IOM, ADRA Polska, CARE, Caritas in Rzeszow
- Transport provision: IOM
- Volunteer mobilization or support: IOM, IOCC/ELEOS, ADRA Polska, Polish Red Cross, Folkowisko Fundation
- Operational field level coordination: UNHCR, CORE
- Legal assistance for UK visa application: Safe Passage International

Filip Bujnowski, Save the Children
We have recently published our call for expressions of interest on contingency planning. We are seeking partners with whom we can collaborate in case of an emergency. This contingency planning encompasses MHPSS, child protection, and NFIs distribution. The outcome of the call will be known by the 15th of December, and the project is set to commence in January.

Yolanda Ines Zapata Henry, Head of UNHCR Rzeszow Field Office
We are conducting contingency planning as a collaborative effort to complement the authorities' response. It is important to identify services in this process. We are organizing ourselves as much as possible through this exercise, and in the event of an emergency, we are prepared to complement the authorities' response.

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AOB	Action Points
Natalia Vorozhko, Alight We have just completed our program of booking apartments with Airbnb, during which we spent 175 000 USD. We have booked 102 apartments for 201 persons, including 36 children. **Volodymyr Mykhalyshyn, Folkowisko Fundation** We were at the border in Korczowa and Medyka, where we received information about the current needs of truck drivers. We provided them with food and water. While truck drivers are typically prepared for long trips, they are not equipped for a two-week stay. They have run out of gas canisters, and refilling them is challenging due to the use of different versions of Ukrainian seals and their reluctance to leave their cargo unattended. Additionally, there is a lack of medical support, and safety concerns arise from trucks carrying chemical elements, posing potential dangers. Those willing to support are invited to join us at the border.	

Participants:

Organization	Name	Surname
Caritas Rzeszów	Krystian	Snopkowski
CORE	Izabela	Quinn
DRC	Agnieszka	Ćwieląg
DRC	Kamila	Ashei
DRC	Jan	Obłudek
Folkowisko Fundation	Volodymyr	Mykhalyshyn
Fundacja Alight	Natalia	Vorozhko
Fundacja Alight	Christopher	Nyamandi
PCK	Marek	Maruszak
PSAR	Jan	Marković
PSAR	Monika	Marković
Save the Children	Filip	Bujnowski
Soleterre	Lisa	Ranzenigo
Soleterre	Marta	Brizzi
UNHCR	Yolanda	Zapata
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